

PROVIDING HIGH QUALITY DRINKING WATER

Plan for, manage and operate the regional water system, in coordination with wholesale customers, to provide water throughout the system that meets regulatory standards, or exceeds them where it is prudent or cost-effective.

Philosophy

The department has traditionally approached meeting its primary mission of providing high quality drinking water to customers with a standard that is better than federal or state regulation. This philosophy of service is now confronted with standards that are increasing in number and complexity, and rising costs that are associated with meeting those standards. It is the department's intent, however, to continue meeting water quality goals that are better than the minimums imposed by regulatory standards to the extent that conditions, costs, and benefits permit.

The department's efforts to maintain those high standards are greatly challenged by the emerging regulatory approach of treating drinking water as a perishable product. In the past, water quality was measured at the source. Because the department maintained a closed watershed policy, water quality regulations were easily met and many regulations did not even apply to the system.

With the regulatory shift emphasizing that water is a perishable product, water is being measured more in the distribution system, and in some cases such as with lead, it is being measured on customer property. This change in the nature and complexity of water quality regulations requires much closer coordination with wholesale and retail customers. It also requires that the department continue the high standards of, and even enhance, its laboratory and technical staff capability.

The increasing number of contaminants that are being regulated and the strengthening of enforcement efforts by regulators is also causing the need for greater investments in monitoring and record keeping. This changing regulatory environment is causing the department to dedicate increasing expenditures, in a way that was unnecessary in the past, to meet more stringent water quality regulations.

As these regulations change and there is more public attention to drinking water quality issues, it will also be increasingly necessary to take extra steps to maintain public confidence in the quality of the water. The department is committed to effectively communicating to customers in order to maintain their confidence that the water from their tap is safe to drink. Since adverse publicity about drinking water quality elsewhere in the state would also erode public confidence locally, the department actively supports a strong drinking water regulatory program by the Washington Department of Health.

Policy Implementation Guidelines

- (1) Develop and implement management strategies, research programs, system improvements, and operational steps that eliminate or minimize localized problems and make water quality conditions consistently high throughout the system.
- (2) Establish and implement appropriate mechanisms for coordinating water quality responsibilities between SWD and its wholesale customers.
- (3) Provide clear, accurate, and timely information on water quality issues to wholesale and retail customers as well as to regional decision makers so that public understanding of water quality issues increases and public confidence in the system is maintained.

- (4) Participate in federal and state health department activities and work closely with them on legislative matters.
- (5) Continue to maintain sufficient monitoring and laboratory capability to provide valid information on water characteristics in the distribution system for assuring regulatory compliance.
- (6) Assure that customers have ready access to laboratory services so they can determine problems due to their plumbing, such as lead from solder.